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#65 in our series by Gilbert Parker

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THE LANE THAT HAD NO TURNING

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 2.

THE ABSURD ROMANCE OF P'TITE LOUISON

THE LITTLE BELL OF HONOUR

A SON OF THE WILDERNESS

A WORKER IN STONE

THE ABSURD ROMANCE OF P'TITE LOUISON

The five brothers lived with Louison, three miles from Pontiac, and Medallion came to know them first through having sold them, at an auction, a slice of an adjoining farm. He had been invited to their home, intimacy had grown, and afterwards, stricken with a severe illness, he had been taken into the household and kept there till he was well again. The night of his arrival, Louison, the sister, stood with a brother on either hand--Octave and Florian--and received him with a courtesy more stately than usual, an expression of the reserve and modesty of her single state. This maidenly dignity was at all times shielded by the five brothers, who treated her with a constant and reverential courtesy. There was something signally suggestive in their homage, and Medallion concluded at last that it was paid not only to the sister, but to something that gave her great importance in their eyes.

He puzzled long, and finally decided that Louison had a romance. There was something which suggested it in the way they said "P'tite Louison"; in the manner they avoided all gossip regarding marriages and marriage-feasting; in the way they deferred to her on questions of etiquette (as, for instance, Should the eldest child be given the family name of the wife or a Christian name from her husband's family?). And P'tite Louison's opinion was accepted instantly as final, with satisfied nods on the part of all the brothers, and whispers of "How clever! how adorable!"

P'tite Louison affected never to hear these remarks, but looked complacently straight before her, stirring the spoon in her cup, or benignly passing the bread and butter. She was quite aware of the homage paid to her, and she gracefully accepted the fact that she was an object of interest.

Medallion had not the heart to laugh at the adoration of the brothers, or at the outlandish sister, for, though she was angular, and sallow, and thin, and her hands were large and red, there was a something deep in her eyes, a curious quality in her carriage commanding respect. She had ruled these brothers, had been worshipped by them, for near half a century, and the romance they had kept alive had produced a grotesque

sort of truth and beauty in the admiring "P'tite Louison"--an affectionate name for her greatness, like "The Little Corporal" for Napoleon. She was not little, either, but above the middle height, and her hair was well streaked with grey.

Her manner towards Medallion was not marked by any affectation. She was friendly in a kind, impersonal way, much as a nurse cares for a patient, and she never relaxed a sort of old-fashioned courtesy, which might have been trying in such close quarters, were it not for the real simplicity of the life and the spirit and lightness of their race. One night Florian--there were Florian and Octave and Felix and Isidore and Emile --the eldest, drew Medallion aside from the others, and they walked together by the river. Florian's air suggested confidence and mystery, and soon, with a voice of hushed suggestion, he told Medallion the romance of P'tite Louison. And each of the brothers at different times during the next fortnight did the same, differing scarcely at all in details, or choice of phrase or meaning, and not at all in general facts and essentials. But each, as he ended, made a different exclamation.

"Voila, so sad, so wonderful! She keeps the ring--dear P'tite Louison!" said Florian, the eldest.

"Alors, she gives him a legacy in her will! Sweet P'tite Louison," said Octave.

"Mais, the governor and the archbishop admire her--P'tite Louison:" said Felix, nodding confidently at Medallion.

"Bien, you should see the linen and the petticoats!" said Isidore, the humorous one of the family. "He was great--she was an angel, P'tite Louison!"

"Attends! what love--what history--what passion!--the perfect P'tite Louison!" cried Emile, the youngest, the most sentimental. "Ah, Moliere!" he added, as if calling on the master to rise and sing the glories of this daughter of romance.

Isidore's tale was after this fashion:

"I ver' well remember the first of it; and the last of it--who can tell? He was an actor--oh, so droll, that! Tall, ver' smart, and he play in theatre at Montreal. It is in the winter. P'tite Louison visit Montreal. She walk past the theatre and, as she go by, she slip on the snow and fall. Out from a door with a jomp come M'sieu' Hadrian, and pick her up. And when he see the purty face of P'tite Louison, his eyes go all fire, and he clasp her hand to his breast.

"Ma'm'selle, Ma'm'selle,' he say, 'we must meet again!'

"She thank him and hurry away queeck. Next day we are on the river, and P'tite Louison try to do the Dance of the Blue Fox on the ice. While she do it, some one come up swift, and catch her hand and say: 'Ma'm'selle, let's do it together'--like that! It take her breath away. It is

M'sieu' Hadrian. He not seem like the other men she know; but he have a sharp look, he is smooth in the face, and he smile kind like a woman. P'tite Louison, she give him her hand, and they run away, and every one stop to look. It is a gran' sight. M'sieu' Hadrian laugh, and his teeth shine, and the ladies say things of him, and he tell P'tite Louison that she look ver' fine, and walk like a queen. I am there that day, and I see all, and I think it dam good. I say: 'That P'tite Louison, she beat them all'--I am only twelve year old then. When M'sieu' Hadrian leave, he give her two seats for the theatre, and we go. Bagosh! that is grand thing that play, and M'sieu' Hadrian, he is a prince; and when he say to his minister, 'But no, my lord, I will marry out of my star, and where my heart go, not as the State wills,' he look down at P'tite Louison, and she go all red, and some of the women look at her, and there is a whisper all roun'.

"Nex' day he come to the house where we stay, but the Cure come also pretty soon and tell her she must go home--he say an actor is not good company. Never mind. And so we come out home. Well, what you think? Nex' day M'sieu' Hadrian come, too, and we have dam good time--Florian, Octave, Felix, Emile, they all sit and say bully-good to him all the time. Holy, what fine stories he tell! And he talk about P'tite Louison, and his eyes get wet, and Emile he say his prayers to him--bagosh! yes, I think. Well, at last, what you guess? M'sieu' he come and come, and at last one day, he say that he leave Montreal and go to New York, where he get a good place in a big theatre--his time in Montreal is finish. So he speak to Florian and say he want marry P'tite Louison, and he say, of course, that he is not marry and he have money. But he is a Protestan', and the Cure at first ver' mad, bagosh!

"But at las' when he give a hunder' dollars to the Church, the Cure say yes. All happy that way for while. P'tite Louison, she get ready quick-sapre, what fine things had she--and it is all to be done in a week, while the theatre in New York wait for M'sieu'. He sit there with us, and play on the fiddle, and sing songs, and act plays, and help Florian in the barn, and Octave to mend the fence, and the Cure to fix the grape-vines on his wall. He show me and Emile how to play sword-sticks; and he pick flowers and fetch them to P'tite Louison, and teach her how to make an omelette and a salad like the chef of the Louis Quinze Hotel, so he say. Bagosh, what a good time we have! But first one, then another, he get a choke-throat when he think that P'tite Louison go to leave us, and the more we try, the more we are bagosh fools. And that P'tite Louison, she kiss us hevery one, and say to M'sieu' Hadrian, 'Charles, I love you, but I cannot go.' He laugh at her, and say, 'Voila! we will take them all with us:' and P'tite Louison she laugh. That night a thing happen. The Cure come, and he look ver' mad, and he frown and he say to M'sieu' Hadrian before us all, 'M'sieu', you are married.'

"Sapre! that P'tite Louison get pale like snow, and we all stan' roun' her close and say to her quick, 'Courage, P'tite Louison!' M'sieu' Hadrian then look at the priest and say: 'No, M'sieu', I was married ten years ago; my wife drink and go wrong, and I get divorce. I am free like the wind.'

"'You are not free,' the Cure say quick. 'Once married, married till death. The Church cannot marry you again, and I command Louison to give you up.'

"P'tite Louison stan' like stone. M'sieu' turn to her. 'What shall it be, Louison?' he say. 'You will come with me?'

"'Kiss me, Charles,' she say, 'and tell me good-bye till--till you are free.'

"He look like a madman. 'Kiss me once, Charles,' she say, 'and let me go.'

"And he come to her and kiss her on the lips once, and he say, 'Louison, come with me. I will never give you up.'

"She draw back to Florian. 'Good-bye, Charles,' she say. 'I will wait as long as you will. Mother of God, how hard it is to do right!' she say, and then she turn and leave the room.

"M'sieu' Hadrian, he give a long sigh. 'It was my one chance,' he say. 'Now the devil take it all!' Then he nod and say to the Cure: 'We'll thrash this out at Judgment Day, M'sieu'. I'll meet you there--you and the woman that spoiled me.'

"He turn to Florian and the rest of us, and shake hands, and say: 'Take care of Louison. Thank you. Good-bye.' Then he start towards the door, but stumble, for he look sick. 'Give me a drink,' he say, and begin to cough a little--a queer sort of rattle. Florian give him big drink, and he toss it off-whiff! 'Thank you,' he say, and start again, and we see him walk away over the hill ver' slow--an' he never come back. But every year there come from New York a box of flowers, and every year P'tite Louison send him a 'Merci, Charles, mille fois. Dieu to garde.' It is so every year for twenty-five year."

"Where is he now?" asked Medallion.

Isidore shook his head, then lifted his eyes religiously. "Waiting for Judgment Day and P'tite Louison," he answered.

"Dead!" said Medallion.

"How long?"

"Twenty year."

"But the flowers--the flowers?"

"He left word for them to be sent just the same, and the money for it."

Medallion turned and took off his hat reverently, as if a soul were passing from the world; but it was only P'tite Louison going out into the garden.

"She thinks him living?" he asked gently as he watched Louison.

"Yes; we have no heart to tell her. And then he wish it so. And the flowers kep' coming."

"Why did he wish it so?" Isidore mused a while.

"Who can tell? Perhaps a whim. He was a great actor--ah, yes, sublime!" he said.

Medallion did not reply, but walked slowly down to where P'tite Louison was picking berries. His hat was still off.

"Let me help you, Mademoiselle," he said softly. And henceforth he was as foolish as her brothers.

THE LITTLE BELL OF HONOUR

"Sacre bapteme!"

"What did he say?" asked the Little Chemist, stepping from his doorway.

"He cursed his baptism," answered tall Medallion, the English auctioneer, pushing his way farther into the crowd.

"Ah, the pitiful vaurien!" said the Little Chemist's wife, shudderingly; for that was an oath not to be endured by any one who called the Church mother.

The crowd that had gathered at the Four Corners were greatly disturbed, for they also felt the repulsion that possessed the Little Chemist's wife. They babbled, shook their heads, and waved their hands excitedly, and swayed and craned their necks to see the offender.

All at once his voice, mad with rage, was heard above the rest, shouting frenziedly a curse which was a horribly grotesque blasphemy upon the name of God. Men who had used that oath in their insane anger had been known to commit suicide out of remorse afterwards.

For a moment there was a painful hush. The crowd drew back involuntarily and left a clear space, in which stood the blasphemer--a middle-sized, athletic fellow, with black beard, thick, waving hair, and flashing brown eyes. His white teeth were showing now in a snarl like a dog's, his cap was on the ground, his hair was tumbled, his hands were twitching with passion, his foot was stamping with fury, and every time it struck the ground a little silver bell rang at his knee--a pretty sylvan sound, in no keeping with the scene. It heightened the distress of the fellow's

blasphemy and ungovernable anger. For a man to curse his baptism was a wicked thing; but the other oath was not fit for human ears, and horror held the crowd moveless for a moment.

Then, as suddenly as the stillness came, a low, threatening mumble of voices rose, and a movement to close in on the man was made; but a figure pushed through the crowd, and, standing in front of the man, waved the people back. It was the Cure, the beloved M. Fabre, whose life had been spent among them, whom they obeyed as well as they could, for they were but frail humanity, after all--crude, simple folk, touched with imagination.

"Luc Pomfrette, why have you done this? What provocation had you?"

The Cure's voice was stern and cold, his usually gentle face had become severe, his soft eyes were piercing and determined.

The foot of the man still beat the ground angrily, and the little bell kept tinkling. He was gasping with passion, and he did not answer yet.

"Luc Pomfrette, what have you to say?" asked the Cure again. He motioned back Lacasse, the constable of the parish, who had suddenly appeared with a rusty gun and a more rusty pair of handcuffs.

Still the voyageur did not answer.

The Cure glanced at Lajeunesse the blacksmith, who stood near.

"There was no cause--no," sagely shaking his head said Lajeunesse, "Here stand we at the door of the Louis Quinze in very good humour. Up come the voyageurs, all laughing, and ahead of them is Luc Pomfrette, with the little bell at his knee. Luc, he laugh the same as the rest, and they stand in the door, and the garcon bring out the brandy--just a little, but just enough too. I am talking to Henri Beauvin. I am telling him Junie Gauloir have run away with Dicey the Protestant, when all very quick Luc push between me and Henri, jump into the street, and speak like that!"

Lajeunesse looked around, as if for corroboration; Henri and others nodded, and some one said:

"That's true; that's true. There was no cause."

"Maybe it was the drink," said a little hunchbacked man, pushing his way in beside the Cure. "It must have been the drink; there was nothing else--no."

The speaker was Parpon the dwarf, the oddest, in some ways the most foolish, in others the wisest man in Pontiac.

"That is no excuse," said the Cure.

"It is the only one he has, eh?" answered Parpon. His eyes were fixed

meaningly on those of Pomfrette.

"It is no excuse," repeated the Cure sternly. "The blasphemy is horrible, a shame and stigma upon Pontiac for ever." He looked Pomfrette in the face. "Foul-mouthed and wicked man, it is two years since you took the Blessed Sacrament. Last Easter day you were in a drunken sleep while Mass was being said; after the funeral of your own father you were drunk again. When you went away to the woods you never left a penny for candles, nor for Masses to be said for your father's soul; yet you sold his horse and his little house, and spent the money in drink. Not a cent for a candle, but--"

"It's a lie," cried Pomfrette, shaking with rage from head to foot.

A long horror-stricken "Ah!" broke from the crowd. The Cure's face became graver and colder.

"You have a bad heart," he answered, "and you give Pontiac an evil name. I command you to come to Mass next Sunday, to repent and to hear your penance given from the altar. For until--"

"I'll go to no Mass till I'm carried to it," was the sullen, malevolent interruption.

The Cure turned upon the people.

"This is a blasphemer, an evil-hearted, shameless man," he said. "Until he repents humbly, and bows his vicious spirit to holy Church, and his heart to the mercy of God, I command you to avoid him as you would a plague. I command that no door be opened to him; that no one offer him comfort or friendship; that not even a bon jour or a bon soir pass between you. He has blasphemed against our Father in heaven; to the Church he is a leper." He turned to Pomfrette. "I pray God that you have no peace in mind or body till your evil life is changed, and your black heart is broken by sorrow and repentance."

Then to the people he said again: "I have commanded you for your souls' sake; see that you obey. Go to your homes. Let us leave the leper--alone." He waved the awed crowd back.

"Shall we take off the little bell?" asked Lajeunesse of the Cure.

Pomfrette heard, and he drew himself together, his jaws shutting with ferocity, and his hand flying to the belt where his voyageur's case-knife hung. The Cure did not see this. Without turning his head towards Pomfrette, he said:

"I have commanded you, my children. Leave the leper alone."

Again he waved the crowd to be gone, and they scattered, whispering to each other; for nothing like this had ever occurred in Pontiac before, nor had they ever seen the Cure with this granite look in his face, or heard his voice so bitterly hard.

He did not move until he had seen them all started homewards from the Four Corners. One person remained beside him--Parpon the dwarf.

"I will not obey you, M'sieu' le Cure," said he. "I'll forgive him before he repents."

"You will share his sin," answered the Cure sternly. "No; his punishment, M'sieu'," said the dwarf; and turning on his heel, he trotted to where Pomfrette stood alone in the middle of the road, a dark, morose figure, hatred and a wild trouble in his face.

Already banishment, isolation, seemed to possess Pomfrette, to surround him with loneliness. The very effort he made to be defiant of his fate appeared to make him still more solitary. All at once he thrust a hand inside his red shirt, and, giving a jerk which broke a string tied round his neck, he drew forth a little pad--a flat bag of silk, called an Agnus Dei, worn as a protection and a blessing by the pious, and threw it on the ground. Another little parcel he drew from his belt, and ground it into the dirt with his heel. It contained a woman's hair. Then, muttering, his hands still twitching with savage feeling, he picked up his cap, covered with dirt, put it on, and passed away down the road towards the river, the little bell tinkling as he went. Those who heard it had a strange feeling, for already to them the man was as if he had some baleful disease, and this little bell told of the passing of a leper.

Yet some one man had worn just such a bell every year in Pontiac. It was the mark of honour conferred upon a voyageur by his fellows, the token of his prowess and his skill. This year Luc Pomfrette had won it, and that very day it had been buckled round his leg with songs and toasts.

For hours Pomfrette walked incessantly up and down the river-bank, muttering and gesticulating, but at last came quietly to the cottage which he shared with Henri Beauvin. Henri had removed himself and his belongings: already the ostracising had begun. He went to the bedroom of old Mme. Burgoyne, his cousin; she also was gone. He went to a little outhouse and called.

For reply there was a scratching at the door. He opened it, and a dog leaped out and upon him. With a fierce fondness he snatched at the dog's collar, and drew the shaggy head to his knee; then as suddenly shoved him away with a smothered oath, and going into the house, shut the door. He sat down in a chair in the middle of the room, and scarcely stirred for half an-hour. At last, with a passionate jerk of the head, he got to his feet, looking about the room in a half-distracted way. Outside, the dog kept running round and round the house, silent, watchful, waiting for the door to open.

As time went by, Luc became quieter, but the look of his face was more desolate. At last he almost ran to the door, threw it open, and called. The dog sprang into the room, went straight to the fireplace, lay down, and with tongue lolling and body panting looked at Pomfrette with

blinking, uncomprehending eyes.

Pomfrette went to a cupboard, brought back a bone well covered with meat, and gave it to the dog, which snatched it and began gnawing it, now and again stopping to look up at his master, as one might look at a mountain moving, be aware of something singular, yet not grasp the significance of the phenomenon. At last, worn out, Pomfrette threw himself on his bed, and fell into a sound sleep. When he awoke, it was far into the morning. He lighted a fire in the kitchen, got a "spider," fried himself a piece of pork, and made some tea. There was no milk in the cupboard; so he took a pitcher and walked down the road a few rods to the next house, where lived the village milkman. He knocked, and the door was opened by the milkman's wife. A frightened look came upon her when she saw who it was.

"Non, non!" she said, and shut the door in his face. He stared blankly at the door for a moment, then turned round and stood looking down into the road, with the pitcher in his hand. The milkman's little boy, Maxime, came running round the corner of the house. "Maxime," he said involuntarily and half-eagerly, for he and the lad had been great friends.

Maxime's face brightened, then became clouded; he stood still an instant, and presently, turning round and looking at Pomfrette askance, ran away behind the house, saying: "Non, non!"

Pomfrette drew his rough knuckles across his forehead in a dazed way; then, as the significance of the thing came home to him, he broke out with a fierce oath, and strode away down the yard and into the road. On the way to his house he met Duclosse the mealman and Garotte the lime-burner. He wondered what they would do. He could see the fat, wheezy Duclosse hesitate, but the arid, alert Garotte had determination in every motion and look. They came nearer; they were about to pass; there was no sign.

Pomfrette stopped short. "Good-day, lime-burner; good-day, Duclosse," he said, looking straight at them.

Garotte made no reply, but walked straight on. Pomfrette stepped swiftly in front of the mealman. There was fury in his face-fury and danger; his hair was disordered, his eyes afire.

"Good-day, mealman," he said, and waited. "Duclosse," called Garotte warningly, "remember!" Duclosse's knees shook, and his face became mottled like a piece of soap; he pushed his fingers into his shirt and touched the Agnus Dei that he carried there. That and Garotte's words gave him courage. He scarcely knew what he said, but it had meaning. "Good-bye-leper," he answered.

Pomfrette's arm flew out to throw the pitcher at the mealman's head, but Duclosse, with a grunt of terror, flung up in front of his face the small bag of meal that he carried, the contents pouring over his waistcoat from a loose corner. The picture was so ludicrous that Pomfrette laughed with

a devilish humour, and flinging the pitcher at the bag, he walked away towards his own house. Duclosse, pale and frightened, stepped from among the fragments of crockery, and with backward glances towards Pomfrette joined his comrade.

"Lime-burner," he said, sitting down on the bag of meal, and mechanically twisting tight the loose, leaking corner, "the devil's in that leper."

"He was a good enough fellow once," answered Garotte, watching Pomfrette.

"I drank with him at five o'clock yesterday," said Duclosse philosophically. "He was fit for any company then; now he's fit for none."

Garotte looked wise. "Mealman," said he, "it takes years to make folks love you; you can make them hate you in an hour. La! La! it's easier to hate than to love. Come along, m'sieu' dusty-belly."

Pomfrette's life in Pontiac went on as it began that day. Not once a day, and sometimes not once in twenty days, did any human being speak to him. The village baker would not sell him bread; his groceries he had to buy from the neighbouring parishes, for the grocer's flighty wife called for the constable when he entered the bake-shop of Pontiac. He had to bake his own bread, and do his own cooking, washing, cleaning, and gardening. His hair grew long and his clothes became shabbier. At last, when he needed a new suit--so torn had his others become at woodchopping and many kinds of work--he went to the village tailor, and was promptly told that nothing but Luc Pomfrette's grave-clothes would be cut and made in that house.

When he walked down to the Four Corners the street emptied at once, and the lonely man with the tinkling bell of honour at his knee felt the whole world falling away from sight and touch and sound of him. Once when he went into the Louis Quinze every man present stole away in silence, and the landlord himself, without a word, turned and left the bar. At that, with a hoarse laugh, Pomfrette poured out a glass of brandy, drank it off, and left a shilling on the counter. The next morning he found the shilling, wrapped in a piece of paper, just inside his door; it had been pushed underneath. On the paper was written: "It is cursed." Presently his dog died, and the day afterwards he suddenly disappeared from Pontiac, and wandered on to Ste. Gabrielle, Ribeaux, and Ville Bambord. But his shame had gone before him, and people shunned him everywhere, even the roughest. No one who knew him would shelter him. He slept in barns and in the woods until the winter came and snow lay thick upon the ground. Thin and haggard, and with nothing left of his old self but his deep brown eyes and curling hair, and his unhappy name and fame, he turned back again to Pontiac. His spirit was sullen and hard, his heart closed against repentance. Had not the Church and Pontiac and the world punished him beyond his deserts for a moment's madness brought on by a great shock!

One bright, sunshiny day of early winter, he trudged through the snow-banked street of Pontiac back to his home. Men he once knew well, and had worked with, passed him in a sled on their way to the great shanty in the backwoods. They halted in their singing for a moment when they saw him; then, turning their heads from him, dashed off, carolling lustily:

"Ah, ah, Babette,
 We go away;
 But we will come
 Again, Babette,
 Again back home,
 On Easter Day,
 Back home to play
 On Easter Day,
 Babette! Babette!"

"Babette! Babette!" The words followed him, ringing in his ears long after the men had become a mere fading point in the white horizon behind him.

This was not the same world that he had known, not the same Pontiac. Suddenly he stopped short in the road.

"Curse them! Curse them! Curse them all!" he cried in a cracked, strange voice. A woman hurrying across the street heard him, and went the faster, shutting her ears. A little boy stood still and looked at him in wonder. Everything he saw maddened him. He turned sharp round and hurried to the Louis Quinze. Throwing open the door, he stepped inside. Half-a-dozen men were there with the landlord. When they saw him, they started, confused and dismayed. He stood still for a moment, looking at them with glowering brows.

"Good-day," he said. "How goes it?"

No one answered. A little apart from the others sat Medallion the auctioneer. He was a Protestant, and the curse on his baptism uttered by Pomfrette was not so heinous in his sight. For the other oath, it was another matter. Still, he was sorry for the man. In any case, it was not his cue to interfere; and Luc was being punished according to his bringing up and to the standards familiar to him. Medallion had never refused to speak to him, but he had done nothing more. There was no reason why he should provoke the enmity of the parish unnecessarily; and up to this-point Pomfrette had shifted for himself after a fashion, if a hard fashion.

With a bitter laugh, Pomfrette turned to the little bar.

"Brandy," he said; "brandy, my Bourienne."

The landlord shrugged his shoulder, and looked the other way.

"Brandy," he repeated. Still there was no sign.

There was a wicked look in his face, from which the landlord shrank back--shrank so far that he carried himself among the others, and stood there, half frightened, half dumfounded.

Pomfrette pulled out a greasy dollar-bill from his pocket--the last he owned in the world--and threw it on the counter. Then he reached over, caught up a brandy-bottle from the shelf, knocked off the neck with a knife, and, pouring a tumblerful, drank it off at a gasp.

His head came up, his shoulders straightened out, his eyes snapped fire. He laughed aloud, a sardonic, wild, coarse laugh, and he shivered once or twice violently, in spite of the brandy he had drunk.

"You won't speak to me, eh? Won't you? Curse you! Pass me on the other side--so! Look at me. I am the worst man in the world, eh? Judas is nothing--no! Ack, what are you, to turn your back on me? Listen to me! You, there, Muroc, with your charcoal face, who was it walk thirty miles in the dead of winter to bring a doctor to your wife, eh? She die, but that is no matter--who was it? It was Luc Pomfrette. You, Alphonse Durien, who was it drag you out of the bog at the Cote Chaudiere? It was Luc Pomfrette. You, Jacques Baby, who was it that lied for you to the Protestant girl at Faribeu? Just Luc Pomfrette. You two, Jean and Nicolas Mariban, who was it lent you a hunderd dollars when you lose all your money at cards? Ha, ha, ha! Only that beast Luc Pomfrette! Mother of Heaven, such a beast is he--eh, Limon Rouge?--such a beast that used to give your Victorine little silver things, and feed her with bread and sugar and buttermilk pop. Ah, my dear Limon Rouge, how is it all different now!"

He raised the bottle and drank long from the ragged neck. When he took it away from his mouth not much more than half remained in the quart bottle. Blood was dripping upon his beard from a cut on his lip, and from there to the ground.

"And you, M'sieu' Bourienne," he cried hoarsely, "do I not remember that dear M'sieu' Bourienne, when he beg me to leave Pontiac for a little while that I not give evidence in court against him? Eh bien! you all walk by me now, as if I was the father of smallpox, and not Luc Pomfrette--only Luc Pomfrette, who spits at every one of you for a pack of cowards and hypocrites."

He thrust the bottle inside his coat, went to the door, flung it open with a bang, and strode out into the street, muttering as he went. As the landlord came to close the door Medallion said:

"The leper has a memory, my friends." Then he also walked out, and went to his office depressed, for the face of the man haunted him.

Pomfrette reached his deserted, cheerless house. There was not a stick

of fire-wood in the shed, not a thing to eat or drink in cellar or cupboard. The door of the shed at the back was open, and the dog-chains lay covered with frost and half embedded in mud. With a shiver of misery Pomfrette raised the brandy to his mouth, drank every drop, and threw the bottle on the floor. Then he went to the front door, opened it, and stepped outside. His foot slipped, and he tumbled head forward into the snow. Once or twice he half raised himself, but fell back again, and presently lay still. The frost caught his ears and iced them; it began to creep over his cheeks; it made his fingers white, like a leper's.

He would soon have stiffened for ever had not Parpon the dwarf, passing along the road, seen the open door and the sprawling body, and come and drawn Pomfrette inside the house. He rubbed the face and hands and ears of the unconscious man with snow till the whiteness disappeared, and, taking off the boots, did the same with the toes; after which he drew the body to a piece of rag carpet beside the stove, threw some blankets over it, and, hurrying out, cut up some fence rails, and soon had a fire going in the stove.

Then he trotted out of the house and away to the Little Chemist, who came passively with him. All that day, and for many days, they fought to save Pomfrette's life. The Cure came also; but Pomfrette was in fever and delirium. Yet the good M. Fabre's presence, as it ever did, gave an air of calm and comfort to the place. Parpon's hands alone cared for the house; he did all that was to be done; no woman had entered the place since Pomfrette's cousin, old Mme. Burgoyne, left it on the day of his shame.

When at last Pomfrette opened his eyes, and saw the Cure standing beside him, he turned his face to the wall, and to the exhortation addressed to him he answered nothing. At last the Cure left him, and came no more; and he bade Parpon do the same as soon as Pomfrette was able to leave his bed.

But Parpon did as he willed. He had been in Pontiac only a few days since the painful business in front of the Louis Quinze. Where he had been and what doing no one asked, for he was mysterious in his movements, and always uncommunicative, and people did not care to tempt his inhospitable tongue. When Pomfrette was so far recovered that he might be left alone, Parpon said to him one evening:

"Pomfrette, you must go to Mass next Sunday."

"I said I wouldn't go till I was carried there, and I mean it--that's so," was the morose reply.

"What made you curse like that--so damnable?" asked Parpon furtively.

"That's my own business. It doesn't matter to anybody but me."

"And you said the Cure lied--the good M'sieu' Fabre--him like a saint."

"I said he lied, and I'd say it again, and tell the truth."

"But if you went to Mass, and took your penance, and--"

"Yes, I know; they'd forgive me, and I'd get absolution, and they'd all speak to me again, and it would be, 'Good-day, Luc,' and 'Very good, Luc,' and 'What a gay heart has Luc, the good fellow!' Ah, I know. They curse in the heart when the whole world go wrong for them; no one hears. I curse out loud. I'm not a hypocrite, and no one thinks me fit to live. Ack, what is the good!"

Parpon did not respond at once. At last, dropping his chin in his hand and his elbow on his knee, as he squatted on the table, he said:

"But if the girl got sorry--"

For a time there was no sound save the whirring of the fire in the stove and the hard breathing of the sick man. His eyes were staring hard at Parpon. At last he said, slowly and fiercely:

"What do you know?"

"What others might know if they had eyes and sense; but they haven't. What would you do if that Junie come back?"

"I would kill her." His look was murderous.

"Bah, you would kiss her first, just the same!"

"What of that? I would kiss her because--because there is no face like hers in the world; and I'd kill her for her bad heart."

"What did she do?" Pomfrette's hands clinched.

"What's in my own noddle, and not for any one else," he answered sulkily.

"Tiens, tiens, what a close mouth! What did she do? Who knows? What you think she do, it's this. You think she pretends to love you, and you leave all your money with her. She is to buy masses for your father's soul; she is to pay money to the Cure for the good of the Church; she is to buy a little here, a little there, for the house you and she are going to live in, the wedding and the dancing over. Very well. Ah, my Pomfrette, what is the end you think? She run away with Dicey the Protestant, and take your money with her. Eh, is that so?"

For answer there came a sob, and then a terrible burst of weeping and anger and passionate denunciations--against Junie Gauloir, against Pontiac, against the world.

Parpon held his peace.

The days, weeks, and months went by; and the months stretched to three years.

In all that time Pomfrette came and went through Pontiac, shunned and unrepentant. His silent, gloomy endurance was almost an affront to Pontiac; and if the wiser ones, the Cure, the Avocat, the Little Chemist, and Medallion, were more sorry than offended, they stood aloof till the man should in some manner redeem himself, and repent of his horrid blasphemy. But one person persistently defied Church and people, Cure and voyageur. Parpon openly and boldly walked with Pomfrette, talked with him, and occasionally visited his house.

Luc made hard shifts to live. He grew everything that he ate, vegetables and grains. Parpon showed him how to make his own flour in primitive fashion, for no miller in any parish near would sell him flour, and he had no money to buy it, nor would any one who knew him give him work. And after his return to Pontiac he never asked for it. His mood was defiant, morbid, stern. His wood he chopped from the common known as No-Man's Land. His clothes he made himself out of the skins of deer that he shot; when his powder and shot gave out, he killed the deer with bow and arrow.

III

The end came at last. Luc was taken ill. For four days, all alone, he lay burning with fever and inflammation, and when Parpon found him he was almost dead. Then began a fight for life again, in which Parpon was the only physician; for Pomfrette would not allow the Little Chemist or a doctor near him. Parpon at last gave up hope; but one night, when he came back from the village, he saw, to his joy, old Mme. Degardy ("Crazy Joan" she was called) sitting by Pomfrette's bedside. He did not disturb her, for she had no love for him, and he waited till she had gone. When he came into the room again he found Pomfrette in a sweet sleep, and a jug of tincture, with a little tin cup, placed by the bed. Time and again he had sent for Mme. Degardy, but she would not come. She had answered that the dear Luc could go to the devil for all of her; he'd find better company down below than in Pontiac.

But for a whim, perhaps, she had come at last without asking, and as a consequence Luc returned to the world, a mere bundle of bones.

It was still while he was only a bundle of bones that one Sunday morning, Parpon, without a word, lifted him up in his arms and carried him out of the house. Pomfrette did not speak at first: it seemed scarcely worth while; he was so weak he did not care.

"Where are you going?" he said at last, as they came well into the village. The bell in St. Saviour's had stopped ringing for Mass, and the streets were almost empty.

"I'm taking you to Mass," said Parpon, puffing under his load, for Pomfrette made an ungainly burden. "Hand of a little devil, no!" cried Pomfrette, startled. "I said I'd never go to Mass again, and I never

will.

"You said you'd never go to Mass till you were carried; so it's all right."

Once or twice Pomfrette struggled, but Parpon held him tight, saying:

"It's no use; you must come; we've had enough. Besides--"

"Besides what?" asked Pomfrette faintly. "Never mind," answered Parpon.

At a word from Parpon the shrivelled old sexton cleared a way through the aisle, making a stir, through which the silver bell at Pomfrette's knee tinkled, in answer, as it were, to the tinkling of the acolyte's bell in the sanctuary. People turned at the sound, women stopped telling their beads, some of the choir forgot their chanting. A strange feeling passed through the church, and reached and startled the Cure as he recited the Mass. He turned round and saw Parpon laying Pomfrette down at the chancel steps. His voice shook a little as he intoned the ritual, and as he raised the sacred elements tears rolled down his cheeks.

From a distant corner of the gallery a deeply veiled woman also looked down at Pomfrette, and her hand trembled on the desk before her.

At last the Cure came forward to the chancel steps. "What is it, Parpon?" he asked gravely.

"It is Luc Pomfrette, M'sieu' le Cure." Pomfrette's eyes were closed.

"He swore that he would never come to Mass again," answered the good priest.

"Till he was carried, M'sieu' le Cure--and I've carried him."

"Did you come of your own free will, and with a repentant heart, Luc Pomfrette?" asked the Cure.

"I did not know I was coming--no." Pomfrette's brown eyes met the priest's unflinchingly.

"You have defied God, and yet He has spared your life."

"I'd rather have died," answered the sick man simply.

"Died, and been cast to perdition!"

"I'm used to that; I've had a bad time here in Pontiac."

His thin hands moved restlessly. His leg moved, and the little bell tinkled--the bell that had been like the bell of a leper these years past.

"But you live, and you have years yet before you, in the providence of

God. Luc Pomfrette, you blasphemed against your baptism, and horribly against God himself. Luc"--his voice got softer--"I knew your mother, and she was almost too weak to hold you when you were baptised, for you made a great to-do about coming into the world. She had a face like a saint--so sweet, so patient. You were her only child, and your baptism was more to her than her marriage even, or any other thing in this world. The day after your baptism she died. What do you think were her last words?"

There was a hectic flush on Pomfrette's face, and his eyes were intense and burning as they looked up fixedly at the Cure.

"I can't think any more," answered Pomfrette slowly. "I've no head."

"What she said is for your heart, not for your head, Luc," rejoined the Cure gently. "She wandered in her mind, and at the last she raised herself up in her bed, and lifting her finger like this"--he made the gesture of benediction--" she said, 'Luc Michele, I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.' Then she whispered softly: 'God bless my dear Luc Michee! Holy Mother pray for him!' These were her last words, and I took you from her arms. What have you to say, Luc Michee?"

The woman in the gallery was weeping silently behind her thick veil, and her worn hand clutched the desk in front of her convulsively. Presently she arose and made her way down the stair, almost unnoticed. Two or three times Luc tried to speak, but could not. "Lift me up," he said brokenly, at last.

Parpon and the Little Chemist raised him to his feet, and held him, his shaking hands resting on their shoulders, his lank body tottering above and between them.

Looking at the congregation, he said slowly: "I'll suffer till I die for cursing my baptism, and God will twist my neck in purgatory for--"

"Luc," the Cure interrupted, "say that you repent."

"I'm sorry, and I ask you all to forgive me, and I'll confess to the Cure, and take my penance, and--" he paused, for breathing hurt him.

At that moment the woman in black who had been in the gallery came quickly forward. Parpon saw her, frowned, and waved her back; but she came on. At the chancel steps she raised her veil, and a murmur of recognition and wonder ran through the church. Pomfrette's face was pitiful to see--drawn, staring.

"Junie!" he said hoarsely.

Her eyes were red with weeping, her face was very pale. "M'sieu' le Cure" she said, "you must listen to me"--the Cure's face had become forbidding--"sinner though I am. You want to be just, don't you? Ah, listen! I was to be married to Luc Pomfrette, but I did not love him--"

then. He had loved me for years, and his father and my father wished it --as you know, M'sieu' le Cure. So after a while I said I would; but I begged him that he wouldn't say anything about it till he come back from his next journey on the river. I did not love him enough--then. He left all his money with me: some to pay for Masses for his father's soul, some to buy things for--for our home; and the rest to keep till he came back."

"Yes, yes," said Pomfrette, his eyes fixed painfully on her face--"yes, yes."

"The day after Luc went away John Dicey the Protestant come to me. I'd always liked him; he could talk as Luc couldn't, and it sounded nice. I listened and listened. He knew about Luc and about the money and all. Then he talked to me. I was all wild in the head, and things went round and round, and oh, how I hated to marry Luc--then! So after he had talked a long while I said yes, I would go with him and marry him-- a Protestant--for I loved him. I don't know why or how."

Pomfrette trembled so that Parpon and the Little Chemist made him sit down, and he leaned against their shoulders, while Junie went on:

"I gave him Luc's money to go and give to Parpon here, for I was too ashamed to go myself. And I wrote a little note to Luc, and sent it with the money. I believed in John Dicey, of course. He came back, and said that he had seen Parpon and had done it all right; then we went away to Montreal and got married. The very first day at Montreal, I found out that he had Luc's money. It was awful. I went mad, and he got angry and left me alone, and didn't come back. A week afterwards he was killed, and I didn't know it for a long time. But I began to work, for I wanted to pay back Luc's money. It was very slow, and I worked hard. Will it never be finished, I say. At last Parpon find me, and I tell him all-- all except that John Dicey was dead; and I did not know that. I made him promise to tell nobody; but he knows all about my life since then. Then I find out one day that John Dicey is dead, and I get from the gover'ment a hundred dollars of the money he stole. It was found on him when he was killed. I work for six months longer, and now I come back--with Luc's money."

She drew from her pocket a packet of notes, and put it in Luc's hands. He took it dazedly, then dropped it, and the Little Chemist picked it up; he had no prescription like that in his pharmacopoeia.

"That's how I've lived," she said, and she handed a letter to the Cure.

It was from a priest in Montreal, setting forth the history of her career in that city, her repentance for her elopement and the sin of marrying a Protestant, and her good life. She had wished to do her penance in Pontiac, and it remained to M'sieu' le Cure; to set it.

The Cure's face relaxed, and a rare gentleness came into it.

He read the letter aloud. Luc once more struggled to his feet, eagerly listening.

"You did not love Luc?" the Cure asked Junie, meaningly.

"I did not love Luc--then," she answered, a flush going over her face.

"You loved Junie?" the Cure said to Pomfrette. "I could have killed her, but I've always loved her," answered Luc. Then he raised his voice excitedly: "I love her, love her, love her--but what's the good! She'd never 've been happy with me. Look what my love drove her to! What's the good, at all!"

"She said she did not love you then, Luc Michee," said Parpon, interrupting. "Luc Michee, you're a fool as well as a sinner. Speak up, Junie."

"I used to tell him that I didn't love him; I only liked him. I was honest. Well, I am honest still. I love him now."

A sound of joy broke from Luc's lips, and he stretched out his arms to her, but the Cure; stopped that. "Not here," he said. "Your sins must first be considered. For penance--" He paused, looking at the two sad yet happy beings before him. The deep knowledge of life that was in him impelled him to continue gently:

"For penance you shall bear the remembrance of each other's sins. And now to God the Father--" He turned towards the altar, and raised his hands in the ascription.

As he knelt to pray before he entered the pulpit, he heard the tinkling of the little bell of honour at the knee of Luc, as Junie and Parpon helped him from the church.

A SON OF THE WILDERNESS

Rachette told the story to Medallion and the Little Chemist's wife on Sunday after Mass, and because he was vain of his English he forsook his own tongue and paid tribute to the Anglo-Saxon.

"Ah, she was so purty, that Norinne, when she drive through the parishes all twelve days, after the wedding, a dance every night, and her eyes and cheeks on fire all the time. And Bargon, bagosh! that Bargon, he have a pair of shoulders like a wall, and five hunder' dollars and a horse and wagon. Bagosh, I say that time: 'Bargon he have put a belt round the world and buckle it tight to him--all right, ver' good.' I say to him: 'Bargon, what you do when you get ver' rich out on the Souris River in the prairie west?' He laugh and throw up his hands, for he have not many words any kind. And the dam little dwarf Parpon, he say: 'He will have flowers on the table and ice on the butter, and a wheel in his head.'

"And Bargon laugh and say: 'I will have plenty for my friends to eat and

drink and a ver' fine time.' "'Good,' we all say-'Bagosh!' So they make the trip through twelve parish, and the fiddles go all the time, and I am what you say 'best man' with Bargon. I go all the time, and Lucette Dargois, she go with me and her brother--holy, what an eye had she in her head, that Lucette! As we go we sing a song all right, and there is no one sing so better as Norinne:

"'C'est la belle Francoise,
Allons gai!
C'est la belle Francoise,
Qui veut se marier,
Ma luron lurette!
Qui veut se marier,
Ma luron lure!'"

"Ver' good, bagosh! Norinne and Bargon they go out to the Souris, and Bargon have a hunder' acre, and he put up a house and a shed not ver' big, and he carry his head high and his shoulders like a wall; yes, yes. First year it is pretty good time, and Norinne's cheeks--ah, like an apple they. Bimeby a baby laugh up at Bargon from Norinne's lap. I am on the Souris at a saw-mill then, and on Sunday sometime I go up to see Bargon and Norinne. I t'ink that baby is so dam funny; I laugh and pinch his nose. His name is Marie, and I say I marry him pretty quick some day. We have plenty hot cake, and beans and pork, and a little how-you-are from a jar behin' the door.

"Next year it is not so good. There is a bad crop and hard time, and Bargon he owe two hunder' dollar, and he pay int'rest. Norinne, she do all the work, and that little Marie, there is dam funny in him, and Norinne, she keep go, go, all the time, early and late, and she get ver' thin and quiet. So I go up from the mill more times, and I bring fol-lols for that Marie, for you know I said I go to marry him some day. And when I see how Bargon shoulders stoop and his eye get dull, and there is nothing in the jar behin' the door, I fetch a horn with me, and my fiddle, and, bagosh! there is happy sit-you-down. I make Bargon sing 'La Belle Francoise,' and then just before I go I make them laugh, for I stand by the cradle and I sing to that Marie:

"'Adieu, belle Frangoise;
Allons gai!
Adieu, belle Francoise!
Moi, je to marierai,
Ma luron lurette! Moi,
je to marierai,
Ma luron lure!'"

"So; and another year it go along, and Bargon he know that if there come bad crop it is good-bye-my lover with themselves. He owe two hunder' and fifty dollar. It is the spring at Easter, and I go up to him and Norinne, for there is no Mass, and Pontiac is too far away off. We stan' at the door and look out, and all the prairie is green, and the sun stan' up high like a light on a pole, and the birds fly by ver' busy looking for the summer and the prairie-flower.

"'Bargon,' I say--and I give him a horn of old rye--'here's to le bon Dieu!'

"'Le bon Dieu, and a good harvest!' he say.

"I hear some one give a long breath behin', and I look round; but, no, it is Norinne with a smile--for she never grumble--bagosh! What purty eyes she have in her head! She have that Marie in her arms, and I say to Bargon it is like the Madonne in the Notre Dame at Montreal. He nod his head. 'C'est le bon Dieu--it is the good God,' he say.

"Before I go I take a piece of palm--it come from the Notre Dame; it is all bless by the Pope--and I nail it to the door of the house. 'For luck,' I say. Then I laugh, and I speak out to the prairie: 'Come along, good summer; come along, good crop; come two hunder' and fifty dollars for Gal Bargon.' Ver' quiet I give Norinne twenty dollar, but she will not take him. 'For Marie,' then I say: 'I go to marry him, bimeby.' But she say: 'Keep it and give it to Marie yourself some day.'

"She smile at me, then she have a little tear in her eye, and she nod to where Bargon stare' houtside, and she say: 'If this summer go wrong, it will kill him. He work and work and fret and worry for me and Marie, and sometimes he just sit and look at me and say not a word.'

"I say to her that there will be good crop, and next year we will be ver' happy. So, the time go on, and I send up a leetla snack of pork and molass' and tabac, and sugar and tea, and I get a letter from Bargon bimeby, and he say that heverything go right, he t'ink, this summer. He say I must come up. It is not dam easy to go in the summer, when the mill run night and day; but I say I will go.

"When I get up to Bargon's I laugh, for all the hunder' acre is ver' fine, and Bargon stan' hin the door, and stretch out his hand, and say: 'Rachette, there is six hunder' dollar for me.' I nod my head, and fetch out a horn, and he have one, his eyes all bright like a lime-kiln. He is thin and square, and his beard grow ver' thick and rough and long, and his hands are like planks. Norinne, she is ver' happy, too, and Marie bite on my finger, and I give him sugar-stick to suck.

"Bimeby Norinne say to me, ver' soft: 'If a hailstorm or a hot wind come, that is the end of it all, and of my poor Gal.'

"What I do? I laugh and ketch Marie under the arms, and I sit down, and I put him on my foot, and I sing that dam funny English song--'Here We Go to Banbury Cross.' An' I say: 'It will be all as happy as Marie pretty quick. Bargon he will have six hunder' dollar, and you a new dress and a hired girl to help you.'

"But all the time that day I think about a hail-storm or a hot wind whenever I look out on that hunder' acre farm. It is so beautiful, as you can guess--the wheat, the barley, the corn, the potatoes, the turnip, all green like sea-water, and pigeons and wild ducks flying up and down,

and the horse and the ox standing in a field ver' comfer'ble.

"We have good time that day, and go to bed all happy that night. I get up at five o'clock, an' I go hout. Bargon stan' there looking hout on his field with the horse-bridle in his hand. 'The air not feel right,' he say to me. I t'ink the same, but I say to him: 'Your head not feel right--him too sof.' He shake his head and go down to the field for his horse and ox, and hitch them up together, and go to work making a road.

"It is about ten o'clock when the dam thing come. Piff! go a hot splash of air in my face, and then I know that it is all up with Gal Bargon. A month after it is no matter, for the grain is ripe then, but now, when it is green, it is sure death to it all. I turn sick in my stomach, and I turn round and see Norinne stan' hin the door, all white, and she make her hand go as that, like she push back that hot wind.

"'Where is Gal?' she say. 'I must go to him.' 'No,' I say, 'I will fetch him. You stay with Marie.' Then I go ver' quick for Gal, and I find him, his hands all shut like that! and he shake them at the sky, and he say not a word, but his face, it go wild, and his eyes spin round in his head. I put my hand on his arm and say: 'Come home, Gal. Come home, and speak kind to Norinne and Marie.'

"I can see that hot wind lean down and twist the grain about--a dam devil thing from the Arzone desert down South. I take Gal back home, and we sit there all day, and all the nex' day, and a leetla more, and when we have look enough, there is no grain on that hunder' acre farm--only a dry-up prairie, all grey and limp. My skin is bake and rough, but when I look at Gal Bargon I know that his heart is dry like a bone, and, as Parpon say that back time, he have a wheel in his head. Norinne she is quiet, and she sit with her hand on his shoulder, and give him Marie to hold.

"But it is no good; it is all over. So I say: 'Let us go back to Pontiac. What is the good for to be rich? Let us be poor and happy once more.'

"And Norinne she look glad, and get up and say: 'Yes, let us go back.' But all at once she sit down with Marie in her arms, and cry--bagosh, I never see a woman cry like that!

"So we start back for Pontiac with the horse and the ox and some pork and bread and molass'. But Gal Bargon never hold up his head, but go silent, silent, and he not sleep at night. One night he walk away on the prairie, and when he come back he have a great pain. So he lie down, and we sit by him, an' he die. But once he whisper to me, and Norinne not hear: 'You say you will marry him, Rachette?' and I say, 'I will.'

"'C'est le bon Dieu!' he say at the last, but he say it with a little laugh. I think he have a wheel in his head. But bimeby, yiste'day, Norinne and Marie and I come to Pontiac."

The Little Chemist's wife dried her eyes, and Medallion said in French:

"Poor Norinne! Poor Norinne! And so, Rachette, you are going to marry Marie, by-and-bye?" There was a quizzical look in Medallion's eyes.

Rachette threw up his chin a little. "I'm going to marry Norinne on New Year's Day," he said. "Bagosh, poor Norinne!" said Medallion, in a queer sort of tone. "It is the way of the world," he added. "I'll wait for Marie myself."

It looks as if he meant to, for she has no better friend. He talks to her much of Gal Bargon; of which her mother is glad.

A WORKER IN STONE

At the beginning he was only a tombstone-cutter. His name was Francois Lagarre. He was but twenty years old when he stepped into the shop where the old tombstone-cutter had worked for forty years. Picking up the hammer and chisel which the old man had dropped when he fell dead at the end of a long hot day's labour, he finished the half-carved tombstone, and gave the price of it to the widow. Then, going to the Seigneur and Cure, he asked them to buy the shop and tools for him, and let him pay rent until he could take the place off their hands.

They did as he asked, and in two years he had bought and paid for the place, and had a few dollars to the good. During one of the two years a small-pox epidemic passed over Pontiac, and he was busy night and day. It was during this time that some good Catholics came to him with an heretical Protestant suggestion to carve a couplet or verse of poetry on the tombstones they ordered. They themselves, in most cases, knew none, and they asked Francois to supply them--as though he kept them in stock like marble and sand-paper. He had no collection of suitable epitaphs, and, besides, he did not know whether it was right to use them. Like all his race in New France he was jealous of any inroads of Protestantism, or what the Little Chemist called "Englishness." The good M. Fabre, the Cure, saw no harm in it, but said he could not speak for any one's grief. What the bereaved folk felt they themselves must put in words upon the stone. But still Francois might bring all the epitaphs to him before they were carved, and he would approve or disapprove, correct or reject, as the case might be.

At first he rejected many, for they were mostly conventional couplets, taken unknowingly from Protestant sources by mourning Catholics. But presently all that was changed, and the Cure one day had laid before him three epitaphs, each of which left his hand unrevised and untouched; and when he passed them back to Francois his eyes were moist, for he was a man truly after God's own heart, and full of humanity.

"Will you read them to me, Francois?" he said, as the worker in stone was about to put the paper back in his pocket. "Give the names of the

dead at the same time."

So Francois read:

"Gustave Narrois, aged seventy-two years--"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the Cure, "the unhappy yet happy Gustave, hung by the English, and cut down just in time to save him--an innocent man. For thirty years my sexton. God rest his soul! Well now, the epitaph."

Francois read it:

"Poor as a sparrow was I,
Yet I was saved like a king;
I heard the death-bells ring,
Yet I saw a light in the sky:
And now to my Father I wing."

The Cure nodded his head. "Go on; the next," he said.

"Annette John, aged twenty years--"

"So. The daughter of Chief John. When Queen Anne of England was on the throne she sent Chief John's grandfather a gold cup and a hundred pounds. The girl loved, but would not marry, that she might keep Chief John from drinking. A saint, Francois! What have they said of her?"

Francois smoothed out the paper and read:

"A little while I saw the world go by
A little doorway that I called my own,
A loaf, a cup of water, and a bed had I,
A shrine of Jesus, where I knelt alone:
And now alone I bid the world good-bye."

The Cure turned his head away. "Go on," he said sadly. "Chief John has lost his right hand. Go on."

"Henri Rouget"

"Aged thirty years," again interrupted the Cure. "Henri Rouget, idiot; as young as the morning. For man grows old only by what he suffers, and what he forgives, and what he sins. What have you to say for Henri Rouget, my Francois?"

And Francois read:

"I was a fool; nothing had I to know
Of men, and naught to men had I to give.
God gave me nothing; now to God I go,
Now ask for pain, for bread,
Life for my brain: dead,
By God's love I shall then begin to live."

The priest rose to his feet and put a hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Do you know, Francois," he said, half sadly, "do you know, you have the true thing in you. Come often to me, my son, and bring all these things --all you write."

While the Cure troubled himself about his future, Francois began to work upon a monument for the grave of a dozen soldiers of Pontiac who were killed in the War of the Patriots. They had died for a mistaken cause, and had been buried on the field of battle. Long ago something would have been done to commemorate them but that three of them were Protestants, and difficulties had been raised by the bigoted. But Francois thought only of the young men in their common grave at St. Eustache. He remembered when they went away one bright morning, full of the joy of an erring patriotism, of the ardour of a weak but fascinating cause: race against race, the conquered against the conquerors, the usurped against the usurpers.

In the space before the parish church it stands--a broken shaft, with an unwound wreath straying down its sides; a monument of fine proportions, a white figure of beaten valour and erring ardour of youth and beautiful bad ambition. One Saturday night it was not there, and when next morning the people came to Mass it was there. All night had Francois and his men worked, and the first rays of the morning sun fell on the tall shivered shaft set firmly in its place. Francois was a happy man. All else that he had done had been wholly after a crude, staring convention, after rule and measure--an artisan's, a tombstone-cutter's labour. This was the work of a man with the heart and mind of an artist. When the people came to Mass they gazed and gazed, and now and then the weeping of a woman was heard, for among them were those whose sons and brothers were made memorable by this stone.

That day at the close of his sermon the Cure spoke of it, and said at the last: "That white shaft, dear brethren, is for us a sign of remembrance and a warning to our souls. In the name of race and for their love they sinned. But yet they sinned; and this monument, the gift and work of one young like them, ardent and desiring like them, is for ever in our eyes the crucifixion of our wrong ambitions and our selfish aims.

"Nay, let us be wise and let us be good. They who rule us speak with foreign tongue, but their hearts desire our peace and a mutual regard. Pray that this be. And pray for the young and the daring and the foolish. And pray also that he who has given us here a good gift may find his thanks in our better-ordered lives, and that he may consecrate his parts and talents to the redeeming actions of this world."

And so began the awakening of Francois Lagarre; and so began his ambition and his peril.

For, as he passed from the church, the Seigneur touched him on the shoulder and introduced him to his English grandniece, come on a visit for the summer, the daughter of a London baronet. She had but just

arrived, and she was feeling that first homesickness which succeeds transplanting. The face of the young worker in stone interested her; the idea of it all was romantic; the possibilities of the young man's life opened out before her. Why should not she give him his real start, win his gratitude, help him to his fame, and then, when it was won, be pointed out as a discoverer and a patron?

All these things flashed through her mind as they were introduced. The young man did not read the look in her eyes, but there was one other person in the crowd about the church steps who did read it, whose heart beat furiously, whose foot tapped the ground angrily--a black-haired, brown-eyed farmer's daughter, who instantly hated the yellow hair and rosy and golden face of the blue-eyed London lady; who could, that instant, have torn the silk gown from her graceful figure.

She was not disturbed without reason. And for the moment, even when she heard impertinent and incredulous fellows pooh-poohing the monument, and sharpening their rather dull wits upon its corners, she did not open her lips, when otherwise she would have spoken her mind with a vengeance; for Jeanne Marchand had a reputation for spirit and temper, and she spared no one when her blood was up. She had a touch of the vixen--an impetuous, loving, forceful mademoiselle, in marked contrast to the rather ascetic Francois, whose ways were more refined than his origin might seem to warrant.

"Sapre!" said Duclosse the mealman of the monument; "it's like a timber of cheese stuck up. What's that to make a fuss about?"

"Fig of Eden," muttered Jules Marmotte, with one eye on Jeanne, "any fool could saw a better-looking thing out of ice!"

"Fish," said fat Caroché the butcher, "that Francois has a rattle in his capote. He'd spend his time better chipping bones on my meat-block."

But Jeanne could not bear this--the greasy whopping butcher-man!

"What, what, the messy stupid Caroché, who can't write his name," she said in a fury; "the sausage-potted Caroché, who doesn't remember that Francois Lagarre made his brother's tombstone, and charged him nothing for the verses he wrote for it, nor for the Agnus Dei he carved on it! No, Caroché does not remember his brother Ba'tiste the fighter, as brave as Caroché is a coward! He doesn't remember the verse on Ba'tiste's tombstone, does he?"

Francois heard this speech, and his eyes lighted tenderly as he looked at Jeanne: he loved this fury of defence and championship. Some one in the crowd turned to him and asked him to say the verses. At first he would not; but when Caroché said that it was only his fun, that he meant nothing against Francois, the young man recited the words slowly--an epitaph on one who was little better than a prize-fighter, a splendid bully.

Leaning a hand against the white shaft of the Patriot's Memory, he said:

"Blows I have struck, and blows a-many taken,
Wrestling I've fallen, and I've rose up again;
Mostly I've stood--
I've had good bone and blood;
Others went down, though fighting might and main.
Now death steps in--
Death the price of sin.
The fall it will be his; and though I strive and strain,
One blow will close my eyes, and I shall never waken."

"Good enough for Ba'tiste," said Duclosse the mealman.

The wave of feeling was now altogether with Francois, and presently he walked away with Jeanne Marchand and her mother, and the crowd dispersed. Jeanne was very happy for a few hours, but in the evening she was unhappy, for she saw Francois going towards the house of the Seigneur; and during many weeks she was still more unhappy, for every three or four days she saw the same thing.

Meanwhile Francois worked as he had never before worked in his life. Night and day he was shut in his shop, and for two months he came with no epitaphs for the Cure, and no new tombstones were set up in the graveyard. The influence of the lady at the Seigneury was upon him, and he himself believed it was for his salvation. She had told him of great pieces of sculpture she had seen, had sent and got from Quebec City, where he had never been, pictures of some of the world's masterpieces in sculpture, and he had lost himself in the study of them and in the depths of the girl's eyes. She meant no harm; the man interested her beyond what was reasonable in one of his station in life. That was all, and all there ever was.

Presently people began to gossip, and a story crept round that, in a new shed which he had built behind his shop, Francois was chiselling out of stone the nude figure of a woman. There were one or two who professed they had seen it. The wildest gossip said that the figure was that of the young lady at the Seigneury. Francois saw no more of Jeanne Marchand; he thought of her sometimes, but that was all. A fever of work was on him. Twice she came to the shed where he laboured, and knocked at the door. The first time, he asked who was there. When she told him he opened the door just a little way, smiled at her, caught her hand and pressed it, and, when she would have entered, said: "No, no, another day, Jeanne," and shut the door in her face.

She almost hated him because he had looked so happy. Still another day she came knocking. She called to him, and this time he opened the door and admitted her. That very hour she had heard again the story of the nude stone woman in the shed, and her heart was full of jealousy, fury, and suspicion. He was very quiet, he seemed tired. She did not notice that. Her heart had throbbed wildly as she stepped inside the shed. She looked round, all delirious eagerness for the nude figure.

There it was, covered up with a great canvas! Yes, there were the

outlines of the figure. How shapely it seemed, even inside the canvas!

She stepped forward without a word, and snatched at the covering. He swiftly interposed and stopped her hand.

"I will see it," she said.

"Not to-day," he answered.

"I tell you I will." She wrenched her hand free and caught at the canvas. A naked foot and ankle showed. He pinioned her wrists with one hand and drew her towards the door, determination and anger in his face.

"You beast, you liar!" she said.

"You beast! beast! beast!"

Then, with a burst of angry laughter, she opened the door herself. "You ain't fit to know," she said; "they told the truth about you. Now you can take the canvas off her. Good-bye!" With that she was gone. The following day was Sunday. Francois did not attend Mass, and such strange scandalous reports had reached the Cure that he was both disturbed and indignant. That afternoon, after vespers (which Francois did not attend), the Cure made his way to the sculptor's workshop, followed by a number of parishioners.

The crowd increased, and when the Cure knocked at the door it seemed as if half the village was there. The chief witness against Francois had been Jeanne Marchand. That very afternoon she had told the Cure, with indignation and bitterness, that there was no doubt about it; all that had been said was true.

Francois, with wonder and some confusion, admitted the Cure. When M. Fabre demanded that he be taken to the new workshop, Francois led the way. The crowd pushed after, and presently the place was full. A hundred eyes were fastened upon the canvas-covered statue, which had been the means of the young man's undoing.

Terrible things had been said--terrible things of Francois, and of the girl at the Seigneury. They knew the girl for a Protestant and an Englishwoman, and that in itself was a sort of sin. And now every ear was alert to hear what the Cure should say, what denunciation should come from his lips when the covering was removed. For that it should be removed was the determination of every man present. Virtue was at its supreme height in Pontiac that day. Lajeunesse the blacksmith, Muroc the charcoal-man, and twenty others were as intent upon preserving a high standard of morality, by force of arms, as if another Tarquin were harbouring shame and crime in this cedar shed.

The whole thing came home to Francois with a choking, smothering force. Art, now in its very birth in his heart and life, was to be garroted. He had been unconscious of all the wicked things said about him: now he knew all!

"Remove the canvas from the figure," said the Cure sternly. Stubbornness and resentment filled Francois's breast. He did not stir.

"Do you oppose the command of the Church?" said the Cure, still more severely. "Remove the canvas."

"It is my work--my own: my idea, my stone, and the labour of my hands," said Francois doggedly.

The Cure turned to Lajeunesse and made a motion towards the statue. Lajeunesse, with a burning righteous joy, snatched off the canvas. There was one instant of confusion in the faces of all--of absolute silence.

Then the crowd gasped. The Cure's hat came off, and every other hat followed. The Cure made the sign of the cross upon his breast and forehead, and every other man, woman, and child present did the same. Then all knelt, save Francois and the Cure himself.

What they saw was a statue of Christ, a beautiful benign figure; barefooted, with a girdle about his waist: the very truth and semblance of a man. The type was strong and yet delicate; vigorous and yet refined; crude and yet noble; a leader of men--the God-man, not the man-God.

After a moment's silence the Cure spoke. "Francois, my son," said he, "we have erred. 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have followed each after his own way, but God hath laid on Him'--he looked towards the statue--'the iniquity of us all.'"

Francois stood still a moment gazing at the Cure, doggedly, bitterly; then he turned and looked scornfully at the crowd, now risen to their feet again. Among them was a girl crying as if her heart would break. It was Jeanne Marchand. He regarded her coldly.

"You were so ready to suspect," he said.

Then he turned once more to the Cure. "I meant it as my gift to the Church, monsieur le Cure--to Pontiac, where I was born again. I waked up here to what I might do in sculpture, and you--you all were so ready to suspect! Take it, it is my last gift."

He went to the statue, touched the hands of it lovingly, and stooped and kissed the feet. Then, without more words, he turned and left the shed and the house.

Pouring out into the street the people watched him cross the bridge that led into another parish--and into another world: for from that hour Francois Lagarre was never seen in Pontiac.

The statue that he made stands upon a little hill above the valley where the beaters of flax come in the autumn, through which the woodsmen pass

in winter and in spring. But Francois Lagarre, under another name, works in another land.

While the Cure lived he heard of him and of his fame now and then, and to the day of his death he always prayed for him. He was wont to say to the little Avocat whenever Francois's name was mentioned:

"The spirit of a man will support him, but a wounded spirit who can bear?"

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

But a wounded spirit who can bear
Man grows old only by what he suffers, and what he forgives
You--you all were so ready to suspect

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